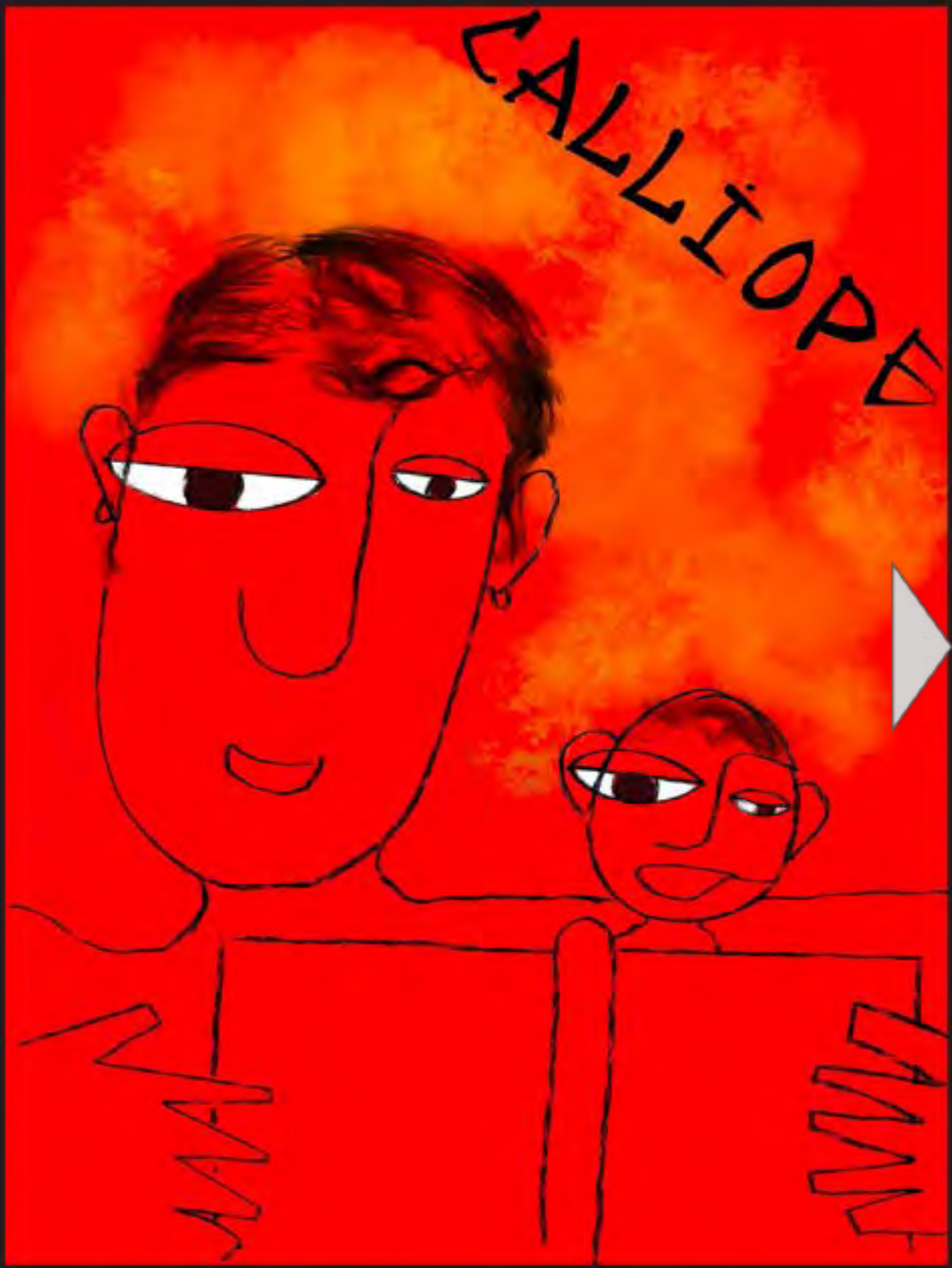
CALLIOPE



Vol. XVII
Spring 2020

THE STUDENT JOURNAL OF ART AND LITERATURE

Calliope

The Student Journal of Art and Literature
Volume XVII - Spring 2020

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calliope *kal<e>i:opi. U.S. (Gr. Kallioph)*

(beautiful-voiced), the ninth of the Muses,
presiding over eloquence and heroic poetry.

1. An instrument consisting of a series of
steam-whistles toned to produce musical notes,
played by a keyboard like that of an organ;

2. attrib. calliope hummingbird,
a hummingbird, sellula ***calliope***, of the
Western United States and Mexico.
Oxford English Dictionary

Calliope First Prize 2020 - Artwork

Duane Ball

Hoi An at Night

Oil on Canvas

Calliope First Prize 2020 - Poetry

Fiona Mustard

Patient Bones

The edge of this world frightens me:
The trees come thin and the rocks ring hollow.
But, look at that sheet of woven sky, sewn with holes—
There's light on the other side, I think,
or maybe another, whiter sheet, beyond which
maybe trees grow thick,
and stones sweat in sunbeams,
and rivers run with syrup—

Or maybe it's more of the same—

Are we out of air ?

Or am I shaking because I've fled so f a r and fast only to drop off the edge of a cliff ?

Such a long way down—
Are there others below ? yet beasts in the wild ?

I can breathe f i r e
Like glass, I've been coddled and smashed,
But we took the broken shards and made knives
to fight the teeth that ride the wind—

Still. I must go back.

There are bills to pay, and taxes to file,
and recycling and newspapers and coffee
and pet food and TV, and a host of dead things
clawing at my ribs as I sink frozen fingers
into the steaming fur of the earth.
But we have time.

And patient bones.
And over snowcapped volcanos,
I smell blood,
and honeysuckle,
and salted waves;
and b e y o n d —

the waiting air, heady, like spun sugar,
sliced through
with wings we grew,
in a g o n y—
in v i c t o r y—
lovely and

f r e e
—

So, wait for me.
Wait for me.
I will return—
—for You.

Calliope Second Prize 2020 - Artwork

Celesta Ball

Mustache Man

Graphite on Tinted Paper

Calliope First Prize 2020 - Nonfiction

Patrick Eivind Schonau Friedner

Roll of the Dice

Back and forth went the blur of the light green tennis ball being thrown from one hand to the other. In a hotel room, of all places, on the weekend of my 18th birthday, of all times, I was playing catch with my little cousin, Harry. The sound of the Mets game playing on the large T.V. being drowned out by his joyous laughter reminded me of the first time I visited Harry and his family at their new home. I remember walking into their fully renovated five-floor brownstone and being greeted by a dream kitchen. Every appliance had at least 4-figure price tags, but what surprised me the most was the massive 75-inch flat screen in the kitchen. The Mets game was playing and Harry was there, intently watching his favorite sport. Some people say money can't buy you happiness, but by looking at the wealthy life Harry was living, and how happy he seemed, at the moment at least, I begged to differ.

"Back and forth just a few more times," I said, noticing it was already 1:30.

As I laid my head to rest, l noticed a complementary pair of red dice on the dresser separating my bed from Harry's. As I picked them up, I also noticed the hole drilled through the centers of the dice. A golden lion with the letters 'MGM' rested on the two sides of the dice. Looking into the translucent material of the dice and the hole drilled straight through the perfectly cubed dice was mesmerizing, almost hypnotizing, as I set the dice down, turned my music on, and went to sleep.

I woke up to the feeling of a light nudge on my back, and the sound of a few hushed giggles from across the room. I opened my eyes to see Harry, giggling while reaching for another tennis ball to toss at me.

"Wake up!" he exclaimed gleefully. "It's time for breakfast Patty!"

After I got ready, Harry, his parents, and I made our way to the Bellagio Patisserie, a pastry/breakfast restaurant situated in the hotel lobby. On our way there, we passed the extravagant, summer-themed art installations. A 25-foot tall blue and white lifesaver which, when looked at through the right angle, perfectly encapsulated the expensive jewelry store in the lobby of the hotel. Harry's parents made it clear they were paying for the whole trip, but what I forgot was, to them, price was but a number.

I was truly reminded of their wealth when I realized the only water purchasable at the restaurant was a three-and-a-half-dollar bottle of Fiji water and Harry's parents, without hesitation just put it on the tray. It was at this point I realized, even though I was born in the same city as these people, raised in the same bloodline, and had known them all my life, we lived completely different lifestyles. Even between Harry and I, it felt like there was a void between us. On the surface, I felt like we should be very similar. We both have the same last name, we have the same bloodline, we both love the Mets (and hate the Yankees), we're both happy, and so much more, but I never felt a

greater divide between us than right then. Even though it was just a bottle of water that caused this thought, it symbolized and meant so much more to me. It reminded me of what I couldn't do because of money, and what Harry was free to do because of money.

I didn't know how to feel. At first, I was relieved because I was not sure if Harry's parents were okay with buying me the water. Then, I was almost put in shock at my thoughts. After that, I felt a mixture of anger and happiness. On one hand, I'm glad that my family was doing so well for themselves. I was glad they are were to be as happy as they were and able to buy things as overpriced as Fiji water. But, on the other hand, I was angry. I didn't even fully know what I was angry about, which made me even angier. Maybe it was the fact that my mother had not gotten a new prescription for her glasses in years and couldn't afford to buy a new ones. Or the fact that my family's washing machine broke months ago, and we had not found the extra funds to buy a new one. Maybe it was the simple fact that Harry and his parents had money to spend on anything they wanted, but my parents and I didn't.

After quelling my emotions, I ordered my food. Harry's parents and I went back and forth discussing my plans for college and what graduating high school was like while Harry spent his time surgically separating his eggs from his toast, making sure they are not touching before deciding they are safe to eat.

Once our breakfast was finished, Harry's parents ordered an Uber while Harry and I went to the front of the hotel. Back and forth, yet again, the small light green ball was thrown from one hand to the other. After playing catch to pass the time, we all got into the Uber and made our way to the harbor. While Harry and his father were talking about baseball, I noticed the first thing everyone probably does when they go to the National Harbor, the 180-foot-high brightly lit Ferris Wheel. While 180 feet is not that high by Ferris Wheel standards, what was truly captivating about it was its location. Directly over the Potomac River, the Ferris Wheel's colorful lights reflected off the water, creating a distracting mosaic of colors sheening across the water. Distracting enough to eventually draw Harry away from his conversation with his father.

"That's the first place we should go, Patty!" Harry remarked, with a childlike wonder fitting for a 10-year-old. I looked at his mother, who gave me a quick nod-of-approval. "Sure, that looks fun," I said, still distracted by the bright lights and the beautiful river.

As we made our way to the Ferris Wheel, weaving through crowded streets and sidewalks, Harry ran ahead of his parents and me. He then turned around and started walking backwards, and as I was admiring the river, I heard a hurried voice. "Patty!" Harry shouted, grabbing my attention just in time for me to catch the tennis ball he threw. Back and forth, yet again the ball flew from one hand to the other, all the way to the Ferris Wheel.

Harry and I made our way into the cabin of the Ferris Wheel and sat down. As the Ferris Wheel started turning, I could feel Harry's excitement, and to a certain extent the feeling was contagious. Once we started moving, I realized why it felt contagious. It wasn't really because of Harry's excitement; instead, I was excited because I could share a moment and have a strong mutual connection with someone who I originally thought would be impossible to connect to. Harry came from a very different upbringing and lifestyle compared to me, so when I thought of Harry, I focused on the differences between us instead of accepting them for what they were, moving on, and enjoying the similarities. Harry had already figured this out. I didn't understand up to that point, but it finally hit me why he enjoyed playing catch with me so much. He knew I used to play baseball, and his favorite thing to do was play baseball. He looked past the differences in our lives and focused on enjoying the similarities. I never thought someone as young as a 10-year-old could have done something so mature, intentionally or not, with something as simple as playing a game of catch.

After Harry and I enjoyed the Ferris Wheel, we spent the rest of the day playing catch. We played catch walking around the harbor. We played catch while on a boat tour of the DC area. We played catch while waiting for an Uber. We played catch while eating lunch. The fact that we weren't talking didn't matter, because the times Harry and I played catch were some of the most profound and engaging back and forth I have ever had.

Once the day was over, and I was about to go to bed, I noticed the pair of red dice again. This prompted me to realize something else. Although Harry and I lived very different lives and were raised very differently, we were still able to greatly enjoy each other's company. This means that despite the upbringing that we were born into, devoid of personal choice, we were still able to come to common ground. This means that, in reality, the financial class one is born into, is nothing more than a random roll of the dice and should be treated as such.

Calliope Third Prize 2020 - Artwork

Jiho Baek

Dreaming

Ink on Paper

Calliope First Prize 2020 - Fiction

Melany Da Silva

Bullfight by Profesora Utonium

My star sign is Taurus––the bull––but I don't believe in horoscopes. That is, I believe the devil can manipulate the night sky to trick people like he did when he guided the magi to young Jesus. He didn't lead them straight to Bethlehem, but through Jerusalem where the envious king Herod requested the magi inform him of Jesus' location once found, claiming he wanted to do obeisance to him. If God hadn't warned the magi in their dreams not to return to Herod, he might have actually killed the future 'king of the Jews.' Maybe the devil can't really juggle the stars, but he's fixed with making humanity err by any means. Was it an apparition? Is that also what makes a bull charge for a matador's red cape? I saw a bullfight once, when I was seven. I watched the bull thrust his horns towards the red cape again and again until the weakness in his breath conquered his rage.

It was my dad who took me to the bullfight. Like every evening, Mom had been reading the Bible. The electricity was down in the neighborhood again so I held a candle for her. I don't remember what chapters she read––whether it was about Solomon's thousand wives, or Jesus resurrecting Lazarus––but in any case, Mom always ended the hearing with a lecture on the weaknesses of the flesh. She had just finished going over lust and greed when Dad showed up with a beer in hand. I packed my bag for the weekend while Mom and Dad screamed at each other in the living room. Dad's appearances were sporadic but a fight was guaranteed each time. Mom smashed a vase against the wall before giving me my blessing to leave.

Dad said we were going to his friend's house. I stuck my head out the window of the black pickup truck as we bounced up a mountain road. The ground was sore from a long day under an irate sun, and vapor rose from the dirt. Dad announced that we had reached our destination when we approached a large gate with a giant white model airplane mounted on top. As we went under the arch, I pushed my body farther out of the truck's side and looked up at the plane's belly. As we passed, the plane shifted against the starry sky. It looked like it was flying.

I had never seen a place so divine. Dad held my hand as we crossed a lush garden before reaching the house. A band played music beside the pool. There were kids splashing in the water while women in bikinis and men with thick gold rings sat at the edges and drank liquor. On one end of the house was a veranda lit up with strings of lights. Beyond its pillars, I saw people mingling at the counter of a bar, laughing and hollering.

"Go play, Martha" Dad waved me off as he turned for the bar.

The estate was a menagerie. There was a zoo filled with animals I had only ever seen in my school books––elephants, monkeys, giraffes, tigers, and more. There was a

small airport. I saw some kids at the edge of the landing strip watching the planes land and take off. I didn't know anyone, but no one seemed to mind me joining. One girl in a froufrou white dress got up from her place and sat next to me. She was my age and her name was Carmen. She wore her dark hair in two braids with gold ribbons and she had straight glossy bangs.

"Who are your parents?" She asked.

I was silent for a beat. My parents?

I told her Mom and Dad's names but Carmen just looked at me with a blank face.

Was that the wrong answer?

She shrugged. Her eyes flicked to the sky and her face beamed.

"Look! There's another one!" she called out.

We all cheered as the gravel beneath us shook from the barrage of the plane's engine as it dived from the sky and skated to a stop on the pavement.

Carmen and I skipped back to the main house arm in arm. She said she'd ask her dad to send a car for me so we could play at her house. I spotted Dad on our way, sitting with a group in a smoke cloud and laughing along with a woman who sat on his lap.

"Princesa, come here. Are you having fun?" Dad called out when he saw me.

I turned to Carmen, "go look for your dad, I'll find you later."

"Go on then, señorita, my daughter is here," Dad shooed the woman off his lap.

She kissed his cheek before walking away. Her hips swayed like a conductor's baton and Dad's eyes followed the symphony.

Dad gave me a kiss on the forehead and sat me on his lap. I told him about the zoo and the airplanes and Carmen while he ran his fingers through my tangled hair.

"Papá, I'm really thirsty."

He held up his bottle of beer and grinned. Mom always told me that stuff was poison–or that it was 'only for grownups,' when I caught her drinking it.

"Papá, can't you get me some water?"

"Drink it Martha, you'll be fine."

The drink was bitter and the gassy liquid made my eyes tear up as it hissed down my throat and then shot up to my temples and spread warmth through my cheeks.

"Get up, I'll show you something great," Dad said, suddenly lurching onto his feet.

Turns out, I had only seen a small part of the grounds. Several other roads spread out from the main house like the limbs of a giant. Dad walked me down one of the arms to a wide plaza. The air was humming. There was an arena in the middle of the plaza and I could hear a raucous audience. An announcer's voice boomed through the surrounding speakers, but I couldn't understand what he was saying.

I was eager to see what was happening inside. Dad walked up the stairs with me and then I darted for the front row. When I made it to the edge of the platform––cold metal railing under my grip, rusty red paint peeling––I saw a man standing in the middle of a colossal dirt pit. He wore a white suit and held a red flag at his side. Gold embellishments ran up the sides of his pants and jacket and dazzled under the arena's lights. The smell from the ground was rank.

The clamor of a bell finally stripped my eyes off the smears of red in the sand. From the side of the ring, a bull came trotting through a pair of swinging doors. He was gorgeous. His thick muscles sprung with force under his satiny black hide––my breath hitched. Blood was gushing down his back.

What came next is a feverish blur. Mostly noise and light. The man in the shiny suit waved his flag around and the bull ran after it again and again, only to have it yanked away every time. Time slowed down every time he missed. The seconds stilled when the bull collapsed. He was right under me, in my line of sight through the rail, just past the tips of my shoes. He lay on his side, mouth agape, heaving. Our eyes met––then I was the bull, bruised under the same yoke. Two men appeared from the sidelines and stabbed the bull with spears.

"Get up!"

But the bull was looking at me. He wasn't going to stand. He could hardly breathe, he never even blinked. I was crying. I wondered if bulls could cry.

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry…

I turned away when the bull's eye began to roll back. I buried my face in Dad's shirt––no, it wasn't him standing behind me. The man smelled of sweat and alcohol and patted me on the head. My head was throbbing. I ran away through the crowd. They were disgusting.

Dad was sitting with a couple of men a few rows above where I'd been. He cackled, choking on his beer. I wiped my teary face and tugged on his arm.

"Papá, please let's leave."

He grinned at me and said goodbye to the men who responded waving or shaking his hand, crying out slurred farewells. We were back outside the arena when Dad asked what was wrong. I only pulled on his hand towards the road to the house.

"What's wrong with you?" he yelled, stopping.

"They're torturing him! That's wrong."

Dad sighed and took another gulp of beer. His body lurched forward as he put his hands on my shoulders and looked me in the eyes. He could barely stand and his weight pressed on my shoulders and made my knees tremble.

"What, you think everything in this world is either good or bad? No, Martha. Life is not like that."

Uyanga Ganzorig

Stripes

Charcoal on Paper

YuJung Lim

Plague Mask

Mixed Media

Calliope Second Prize 2020 - Poetry

Chase Schofield

Hymn

"Hymn"
I remember the song
He would hum
Softly into my palms.
Cradled to my chest,
I drown in his benevolent melody
Bathed in his bel canto. His hymn.

His hymn
His song.
Even his melody
Was glory and praise, hummed
As it flourished from his chest.
I clasp my palms

To his palms.
Endowing myself to him.
Engraved into my chest
Were the lyrics to our song.
Words so soft, so intimate, they hummed
To a sacrificed melody.

Baptized in his melody.
My palms
Vibrated with the hum
Of his lips, washed virgin with his hymn.
Treasuring the subtle adagio of his song.
I kept it buried in my chest.

I locked my chest,
Withholding the melody
And the song
That left my palms
Hungry to touch him. To feel his hymn.
I never tried to hum
The same way he would hum.
Fear built up like dissonance in my chest.
I wasn't beautiful or blessed like him.
A dead elegy, my melody
Falls from grace, from his palms
And souring his song.

His song, his hum, his voice grazed my
palms as they fluttered to my chest.
His melody, slow like a minuet waltzed by
angels,
Left me crippled and craving.

Amy Alba

Turtles

Cast Aluminum

Duane Ball

On Becoming Gachet - A Self-Portrait

Oil on Canvas

Calliope Second Prize 2020 - Nonfiction

Marina Kessenich

Blue

"What color do you want tonight?" I ask the little boy in his too big bed that we once shared when he was less himself and I was less myself.

"Blue" but the L is left unsaid, unincorporated into his person, I imagine it's a few developmental transitions away. I press the fourth button and the starlight glows blue, and then the fifth button and the bulb turns as blurry stars move wall to wall, stretching then shrinking, and there is a crescent moon. What a deep blue.

Blue is all of their favorite colors. His father's eyes are blue, a dark blue that was hard to see under his brow. I never was able to memorize his eyes though I remember telling him they were the color of falling down to Earth. Maybe that was a flattering exaggeration or maybe I've forgotten how much I actually loved him.

My lover talks about cool blue. Cold blue? Cool blue. Almost gray, dimmed, unassuming. I imagine the color as a shape, square like the splotch he showed me, in an empty room. Still and almost lacking in emotion as if it were actually gray, but the hue shows through almost imperceptible, I imagine it's a faded shade of something that was once a little more vibrant.

Blue is my foundation but I exist in the yellow of daisies and center of chamomile, a crayon drawing of a cornered sun, mustard in waved lines, the bedroom walls of a childhood best friend. I see yellow in the shape of a smile or flowing skirt.

As yellow plays in the open air and blue settles into contained lakes they produce the green grass that feels cold and wet under bare feet. It cushions my running and my sitting as I pluck at the single blades, rip them apart strand by strand, tie them into knots, blow at them between my thumbs. I fiddle, and I itch at my bony ankles as I remember climbing trees and plucking off the green leaves, turning them to paste between my nails and studying the chlorophyll.

My daughter is the green of nature, the sign that water, source of life, exists nearby without having to soak in it till fingers prune and a stray breeze makes me wish I were dry. She is the green of childhood clover, of padded moss, and of approaching, tantalizing storms as the wind picks up and static coats your arms.

There is blue when I look up from Earth too, it is not always grounded, you can turn it upside down and find something more pastel, a trick of atmosphere to make us feel bigger than we are. What does it look like when you turn your head up to the sky from the rusty red surface of Mars?

The cosmos finds itself contained in four white, dusty walls, blue stars and crescent moon grow and shrink throughout the night, as I peak in an open door, and startle as the floor creaks, to make sure no Lilith has stumbled across this smallest of men, who are blue.

The light colors everything pale around us, the little boy's skin a sickly shade of cyanosis, as if he were dead and buried in a block of ice, but he breathes loudly, snoring like he is sure to as an old man with a red beard. As if he deserves the space he occupies at such a young age, when I, 25 years older, hardly ever feel that way.

I touch his still forehead, surprised by his warmth, my hand absorbs his dreams and I see the same star light spinning slow shapes of the same hue onto the walls, but these shapes are clear and defined, constellations mimic the night sky. Orion circles the room in pursuit of Taurus and they are as blue as Neptune as blue as the middle of the Mediterranean, where Moses may have drifted if his basket slipped from the bulrushes and the Nile birthed him through its delta, left to dehydrate in the sun and salt.

I lift my hand from the head of Moses and I am returned to this blue Earth of men, my son and I exhale in unison.

Calliope Second Prize 2020- Fiction

Emily Galloway

Mirrors and Smoke

It's time for the eleven o'clock news when Warren slips into the backyard, and it's dark and cold enough that he's confident he won't be followed. He slides behind the privacy wall to his right, shielding him underneath the deck, and retrieves his cigarettes from a hollow rock.

After his first drag his shoulders slump, the tension from his back evaporating. After his third his headache dulls. Right before his seventh he hears the patio door slide open, which leads him to drop ash on his bare foot, and hiss, giving away his location. He knows he's been caught when a phone flashlight momentarily blinds him, but he buries the cigarette in the dirt with his toes anyway.

He looks back up to see Joan squinting at him, in her bathrobe and slippers, and he's genuine when he apologizes. "God, I wish I could kick this, honey. I really do. I feel helpless."

She sighs and invites him back inside. She doesn't ask for the pack this time and he doesn't remind her. She sits at the kitchen table, kicking out the chair next to her for him. He's silent and sorry like a dog, and he knows he deserves more than whatever's coming.

"Why do you feel like you can't quit?" she asks.

Warren is taken aback, because this is the first time she's ever asked about his point of view. She's usually angry, blames his lack of willpower for breaking the last promise he made that actually matters, but now she just sounds tired. Despite the surprise, he drops the ball. He doesn't let her know that every time he smokes a cigarette, he feels close to his dead father, doesn't tell her it feels like his entire day is tension building on tension building on tension that can only be released by that first drag. His father was an avid smoker, but he was also a child of the 30s, and Warren can still feel the harsh slap he'd give every time he cried as a child; he only tells her that he doesn't know why he can't quit.

Joan's even more tired after this same tired excuse. She excuses herself to bed and leaves Warren at the kitchen table to kick himself until he follows her, hours later.

*****

The kitchen is still home to last night's tension, but also filled with the smell of bacon and eggs, Warren's silent apology. Joan's still in her pajamas when she enters, and Warren kisses her on the cheek while handing her a full plate.

Joan's cutting into her first egg when Warren stumbles out, "I want to fix this, honey."

She leaves him hanging while she chews, his bouncing leg betraying his poker face. She simply says, "Oh?"

Warren watches her walk away and yells his promise again before she's out of sight. He puts the plates in the dishwasher and doesn't leave the kitchen until Joan has left for work.

*****

That evening, as they're digesting dinner on the couch, Warren has second thoughts. He doubts his plan will be enough to satisfy what Joan wants from his grand, promised solution. He doubts he'll be able to get past his father's conditioning enough to be honest. He doubts there even is an afterlife, where Janie is frowning down on him every time he smokes. He doubts he'll be able to quit at all.

He goes for it anyway, because he promised, and he's no coward.

"I went to CVS today," he starts, getting up and reaching behind the couch, "and bought every smoking-cessation solution they had." He sits back down and places a bag between them.

"They had gum, patches, lozenges. I bought two of each box. I'm gonna try the gum right now." He reaches for the gum box and smiles at Joan, whose eyebrows are raised but smiles back anyway. The foil on the back of the gum pack crinkles as he pops one in his mouth.

"I'm glad you're keeping your promise," she tells him. "But it's not all about the smoking, Warren."

Like a record scratching to a stop, his smile dims. The TV is droning in the background and he furrows his eyebrows, confused.

"What do you mean it's not all about the smoking?"

"I mean it's been three years since Janie died and you still go quiet when I mention her," she states, and Warren loudly sucks in a breath at her name, prompting her to continue. "Like that, Warren. You never talk about it. You never did. And I understand we all grieve in our own way, but you've been withdrawn since we buried her, and it's been three years since I felt like I had you here."

Stuffed into his corner of the couch, he croaks out, "I'm sorry, I'm genuinely sorry. I love you."

"I love you too, honey. But we've both been through something terrible, and I've needed you here for it."

At this, Warren feels like a failure. He feels like a bad husband, a bad father, and a bad son. He feels like excelling at all three requires fulfilling three vastly different criteria, and he feels like this conversation will be the most important one he's had in a long time. He feels like he's tired of disappointing Joan. He feels like he wants a smoke.

He pops another piece of gum before answering. "When I think about promising Janie that I'd stop smoking, I think about dad getting me two packs of cigarettes for my thirteenth birthday. And when I think about dad getting me those cigarettes, I think of him dying of lung cancer fifteen years later."

Joan is silent when he pauses, The Price is Right playing softly in the background. When Warren shudders the audience claps. She mutes it for him.

"Do you remember when we first got Janie's diagnosis, and the doctor said it was genetic? And I researched into my family history, and learned I had a cousin die of the same thing before I was born?"

Joan nods.

"When I found that out, I remember sitting there and thinking about how Janie being sick is all my fault. And I never told you this, because I know it's stupid and everyone carries some bad genes, but I still feel like that to this day. I feel like I did that to her, to us."

Joan fiddles with her pant leg and stares at the carpet while Warren stares at her. When he finishes, she looks back up at him. They're both about to cry.

"I wish you didn't feel that way," she tells him.

"I know, honey," he replies.

He grasps the hand she's offered him, and finally starts to cry when he reopens his mouth.

"I'm trying to please all three of you at once. Dad, Janie, and you. But you all need different things from me, and only one of you is alive, and I need to remember that. You're all I've got left, honey, and I wish it wouldn't take an intervention for me to see this."

Joan is crying too, now, and she squeezes his hand hard. It's half past eight and silent aside from their sniffling and the cricket trapped in the laundry room. Warren is staring at Janie's portrait above the fireplace.

"I think you should get counseling, honey," Joan admits. "I think we both should. My new insurance plan covers it." Warren sighs like he knew this was coming and nods. He'll start calling offices tomorrow at lunch. "And thank you for opening up to me. I know it was hard for you, I know how hard your dad was on you. I love you, and I don't think there's much you could say to change that." She pulls him off the couch by the hand and hugs him tight. He hugs her back just as hard when she sniffles into his shoulder. "Let's go to bed," she says, and he follows her up the steps.

*****

The next morning, after seeing Joan off to work, Warren heads under the deck to his hollow rock. He takes out the lighter and cigarettes and considers throwing them out. He also considers lighting one. He thinks about the stench on his clothes and in his hair and having to hide it from Joan. He does neither, only places them back in the rock and goes inside, then leaves through the front door to head to work.

Calliope Third Prize 2020 - Poetry

Mia Delmonico

Learning to Heal

Three words is all it took
To get me through the door.
I was prepared to explain more,
But they were already slapping
a band onto my wrist,
And leading me back.
At 3am I saw my best friend cry
For the first time, and my boyfriend's eyes
mist up as they closed me into
the ambulance.
I got the best, that people barely get,
because of those three little words.
I still hadn't explained more.
I arrived at 6am to a big,
kind building.
When they wheeled me inside,
I wasn't allowed to walk,
They handed me breakfast. I didn't eat it.
I was afraid
Of what my parents would say, as I had not
Told them that I would be checking in.
Walking around the nurses' station
Were other patients holding jugs of
Water and many held books
As that is all they were allowed to have.
They gave me my room, and then set me free.
I stood, in a robe, holding the
Non-slip socks they gave to everyone.
The patients looped around and invited me to join them.
I hesitated and they asked
Why I was there.
"I have schizophrenia."
I said, and waited for that Face.
"That's alright. Do you want to walk?"
I nodded and took my
First Steps.

Daniel Durand

Untitled

Acrylic on Paper

Calliope Third Prize 2020 - Nonfiction

Victoria Scholl

Two Inches from Death

"Dude...it's hot." That was something we all said. In fact, we had said it so often that it was how we marked each passing hour that we had been out in the 118-degree weather. There was no need to check our watches for the time, because we would be out in the field from dawn to dusk watching the sun rise and fall every day. There was never complete silence, only the sounds of our whining, slamming doors, and the up-armored HMMWV's (High Mobility Multipurpose Vehicle or "humvee") broken air conditioning trying its hardest to lower the internal temperature below 145 degrees. The smells of dirt, sweat, Copenhagen Wintergreen, stale cigarettes, and a cracked Red Bull mingled together to form a disgusting, yet comforting scent, something we all equally loved and hated.

There were four of us crammed inside the HMMWV with our rifles standing, muzzle down, between our legs. Our gunner was sitting in his swing paying attention to everything outside for the rest of us while we had a heated game of rummy going. I shifted in my seat. My back was on fire from sitting still for hours on end with about 40 pounds of gear resting on my shoulders. As I wiggled my legs, I could feel the blood start to flow again, even though my butt and legs had gone numb.

"For the love of all things holy! Smoke break, guys. I need to stand up." While our lead called over the radio to have our position replaced, the rest of us gathered up the cards and hid them in our gear, so nobody would catch us with unauthorized items. Our gunner let us know when another HMMWV had our position covered, and we started on our journey to the smoke pit and porta-johns. Every bump we hit sent pins and needles down my legs and pain up my spine. Every now and then, someone would groan from the pain. My rifle, still between my legs, slammed into my knee when we came to a stop.

"Air! I need fucking air!" We three passengers exited the vehicle gasping for fresh air, while the driver and gunner remained inside. The "fresh" air was searing hot, but still cooler than what was inside the HMMWV. I shook my legs out, feeling pins and needles shoot from my hips down to my toes. I tapped the toe of my boot on the concrete barrier next to the smoke pit to try to liven up my feet. I felt beads of sweat dripping down the center of my back as I stretched my arms out, lifting my vest up a bit.

I heard the smacking sound of our lead packing his tin of Copenhagen while I lit a cigarette, and I turned to look at the guy who was sitting next to me in the vehicle. I still don't remember his name because he was the new kid. None of us knew his name yet. He was leaning against the building by the smoke pit with his eyes closed, and I could tell he was enjoying the shade and cooler air. Everyone was like that at first, but eventually, we got used to the heat. I leaned against the building next to him and asked him what made him want to join this career field and laughed when he told me his recruiter didn't mention the ungodly heat he would be stuck sitting in.

Time stopped for a split second as I heard a loud bang. My attention narrowed, and my vision sharpened. I turned my head to see a bullet hole in the wall a couple inches from my head. It was as if time slowed down but I was moving at normal speed, all leading me towards a spectacular moment of clarity. We live our lives with a fog in our brains that can only be lifted, unfortunately, by a near death experience.

My ears were ringing from the sound the mortars made when they exploded in the air. I grabbed the back of the kid's vest and yanked him down to a kneeling position behind the concrete barrier. He looked confused, so I slapped him to wake him up from whatever bad dream he was having as if to tell him that this is real. This was happening.

"We have to go back!" I pointed towards the HMMWV, and the kid nodded. We made our run for the vehicle and dove in. Our lead was attempting to talk over the radio as the sound of our heavy weapon firing on top of the HMMWV drowned him out. Everyone inside the vehicle was getting pelted by spent casings. I placed my left hand on our gunner's boot and my right hand on the butt of my rifle while we drove off to our original position.

All I could think during our drive was, "Not today, Satan, not today." I may not like my life, but I didn't want it to end just yet. Eventually, we got back to where we were supposed to be, and the gunfire stopped. We all took a deep breath in unison, laughing because of the adrenaline rush and the ridiculousness of our synchronized sigh. Our lead turned to look at the new guy and said, "Hell of a first day, kid."

Danya Wieder

Upside the Pool

Acrylic on Canvas

Calliope Third Prize 2020 - Fiction

Jeremiah Thomas

A Choice

It was a crystal-clear night in the American wilderness when it happened.

A white star seemed to fall across the sky. A sort of snow fell from it, warm like a hearth yet cool like a spring breeze.

Dave was stumbling through the woods, unsure how much he had drunk. His pickup sat in a parking lot a mile behind him. It occurred to him that he had not turned off the engine or closed the door. He decided that it didn't matter much.

A single tear fell from his eye as he fell through the woods. The bottle seemed to quiver in his hand, as though it had a mind of its own. He had no clue what he intended to do in the woods, but he gathered it had something to do with the waterfall two miles ahead of him.

It was hardly a surprise, then, when the white star in the sky seemed to fall down to earth. He thought momentarily about shielding himself but decided against the effort. The star fell down and down and down from the sky until it seemed to hover momentarily over the grotto, before softly descending in front of him. It was a brilliant sphere of white, about three feet across.

The star unfolded itself, revealing two slender arms and two graceful legs. A beautiful head rose between a pair of shoulders, and holes in the radiance marked where the being's eyes must have been.

"Are you an angel?" he said, unprepared for any answer.

"Not an angel, friend. Merely a traveler."

"What do you want?"

The being looked around at the forest, appearing to be in awe of the leaves.

"Oh, I've come to this world looking for people. I have a great gift, you see, and I love to use it to ease the pain of others."

"Can you fix my fucking life?"

"I can try. Might I ask your name?"

"Dave."

"Well, Dave, what is the issue?"

"I… well, I…" He began to feel woozy, more than likely caused by the bottle in his hands. His sense of balance left him, and he fell to the ground. He scratched his cheek on a long branch. It began to bleed over the autumn leaves, staining them a deeper red than their rotting pallor.

Rather than standing back up or nursing his wound, he quietly began to sob.

"I'm… I'm so messed up."

"Why are you crying, Dave?"

"I'm not strong enough," he said between sobs. "I have… bills. I can't pay them.

Can't even see a goddamned therapist. So the only thing I can do is—is drink. I just drink. There's nothing left inside me. I can't do this."

"Oh, dear. That sounds terribly dreadful. What could I do to help you with this?"

"God, I don't know. I just…I feel like I don't want to live anymore. I feel like there's no way out of this. Even if I worked as hard as I could and played like society's puppet. I just can't do this anymore."

"Is this a common sentiment among your people?"

"I mean…my brother Rob tried to overdose in college. And Brooke, she won't say it, but I know she does. Something about the way her eyes look late at night."

"It seems like many of your people yearn for death, Dave."

"I guess they do."

"And if you could die tomorrow, Dave, what would happen then?"

"My family…my family would be sad. They'd miss me. I'd just…want them to know why I did it. Why it wasn't their fault. Why are you asking me, anyway?"

"I am merely trying to help. You would want them to know that?"

"I would. I wish I could…leave them a note."

"I see. That's very understandable, Dave. My wish to help you has grown even more."

"You do? Been a long time since someone said that to me."

"You've been a great help to me, Dave. You have given me much information about this world. I intend to return the favor."

"I'd appreciate that a whole lot, angel-face. Tell God I said 'hi'."

"I told you, Dave, I'm no angel. Just a traveler who likes to help."

With that, the traveler disappeared back into the sky, as gracefully as it had come.

*****

The first reported person to die was a Japanese father of two, walking the streets of Tokyo. He was on his way home after a hard day's work when he fell limp on the pavement, eyes open and heart stopped cold. Passersby shrieked and scrambled to call an ambulance, but by the time the authorities arrived, they found him totally and irreversibly dead.

A white, glowing message, scrawled in perfect Japanese, floated above his corpse:

"I'm sorry, to all my friends and family, but I can't go on. I hate my job with everything I have. I have no friends. I cannot remember the last time I read a book. I have not seen or touched my wife in seven months. I do not know what my own children are like. There is nothing for me in this world. Goodbye.

-Shigeru"

A small group of pedestrians stood by his vacant body, trying and trying to resuscitate him underneath the otherworldly message. Their efforts were to no avail. His face was dry like ash from the moment they had arrived.

As his body was loaded into the ambulance, passersby said small prayers to help his soul.

Even so, a seed had been planted. Stories of similar deaths, now numbering over

three hundred, found their matches over social media. They came from all over the world. America. India. Russia. The United Kingdom. South Korea. In each one, the victim fell over without warning, and ghastly white letters explained their reasoning. Trends were drawn, and theories were made. A pandemic? A terrorist attack? The wrath of God?

*****

Twenty-four hours after Shigeru's death, no one else fell over dead on the ground. No more white words appeared over dead bodies. The death count plateaued in the billions. The world held its breath, but as it became clearer and clearer that the horror had passed, the authorities of the world began the slow task of rebuilding.

Factories across the world were nearly vacant. Office buildings had half the usual amount of staff. College campuses, once so full of life, were husks of their former selves. Not a soul mentioned what had happened to the schools.

As much horror and sadness as there was throughout the world, a strange sense of normalcy descended as the days dragged on. Once the last body was buried, the world continued as normal.

*****

"Did I help you, Dave?"

He shrieked, because there was no floor where he found himself. He was floating in the void of space.

"What--? Where am I?"

"You are in the place where I dwell, between the worlds. Let me ask you again: did I help?"

"I mean…I mean," his mind flooded with horror as the knowledge of what had happened entered his mind by some force. He saw Shigeru and Sara lying dead in funeral caskets. He then saw himself, rotting in the forest he had died in.

"Jesus. Jesus. Jesus Christ."

"You don't like it?"

"Not like this. Not like this."

"But you said you and your people wanted to die."

"No. No. I didn't…I mean, I said that, but…look how many people you killed!"

"I don't understand."

"I…when I said I wanted to die, that doesn't mean that I thought it would fix everything. It didn't fix anything."

"I disagree. Look, Dave, everyone is happy. Your world has gone back to normal. In fact, I would say it's even better than normal. Many of your people are happier than before."

"No, no, that's wrong. The world has gone back to normal, but that's the problem, you idiot!"

"How can that be the case?"

"People shouldn't want to die. The answer isn't…isn't to let them, it's to fix the things that made them want to in the first place. And…and those people who are hap-

pier now? It doesn't matter. Every single person who died—they had value. More value than all the happiness in the world. Those people were worth something, every single one. Even the worst of them. They were worth something. They could have done something. You ended that chance."

The traveler's radiant face paused to reflect for a moment.

"Your world is very strange indeed, Dave. I will have to think about this for quite a while."

Before Dave could say anything more, the traveler disappeared, and with that, Dave met the warm embrace of oblivion once again.

Celesta Ball

Saffron with Daisy Crown

Digital Photography

Poetry

Marina Kessenich

27

My name is Marina,
Of the Sea,
or rather of land
where my mother's water broke at midnight
And later, in a hospital at 8am,
on a small island wrapped in water,
my mother screamed me into the world
and then nursed me back
into contentment.

I was a happy baby she says.

In my 27th year of life
I would never compare myself to a Phoenix,
to that cliche,
but I will say
that I committed the questionable act
of slash and burn
without knowing what would grow
but there are flowers in bloom
that will maybe one day lead to fruit,
even if the air still feels hot.

In my decade as an adult I've been
on this quest
for balance,
I've found that there is little more than
teetering.
Zen is achieved in small moments of
gratitude
and appreciation for one's immediate
surroundings.
The rest of life is collecting
support
so that when you tilt,
not just to the left or right,
but forward or backward,
you have something to nudge you back
towards center,
aiding your strengthening
muscles
and sense of
balance.

Teetering
is the sweet spot,
and you teeter while
taking a 93 year old man's blood pressure
and asking him what islands or countries
he went to while on a ship
during war time;
or in the car with the music loud
and the children quiet;
or when you find a dandelion
clinging to your sweater
while you sit down to pee;
or when your friend tells a good joke
right after you both took
Jell-O shots.

You find that life is strange
and you fall in love with a strange man
who teaches you to love concept albums
and shows you that you can let someone in,
even if it's really scary,
while moving forward on your own path.

If you're lucky,
from time to time,
you provide support to those teetering around you,
and you hold hands while laughing and wobbling
or maybe sobbing,
perhaps a quiet nudge while no one is looking.

I look back on this past year
with my jaw hanging open in disbelief
that this is what life as me could be.

I can't say that I am content with who I am,
I am quite uncomfortable with myself,
but I feel pride in the path I have chosen
and validation in measuring the ways I have grown,
and what I have gained from being vulnerable.
I move closer to being comfortable
in this skin and loud mind.

I am not happy,
but I am ecstatic and excited,
despite anxiety and insecurity,
I am teetering.
perhaps a quiet nudge while no one is looking.

I look back on this past year
with my jaw hanging open in disbelief
that this is what life as me could be.
I can't say that I am content with who I am,
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Jiho Baek

Landing

Colored Ink on Paper

Amy Alba

Dolphins

Cast Bronze

NonFiction

Jungwon Kim

A Boy and an Idiot

Homeostasis and Dynamic Equilibrium are the concepts to depict any living being's strategy for survival. Any biological system struggles to maintain stability, Dynamic Equilibrium, in which change occurs continuously but relatively uniform condition persists, by adjusting to the changing conditions through the self-regulating process, Homeostasis[1].

But those are mere terms used to describe the real ragged lives of existences in the world. It's truly a challenge more demanding than you can imagine in real life to attain Homeostasis by just keeping Dynamic Equilibrium. The following is my portrait pictured by some meaningless words; I think words are highly elaborate abstracts, which means that reality, or the actuality of the world, is over the word defining it. But without words, it's almost impossible to draw my portrait through which you can peer into the possibility of application of Homeostasis, Dynamic Equilibrium to your life. Apply those frames to your life. And start drawing your portrait. It will be your journey to answer the questions: who are you? And where are you heading?

This is the ongoing and never-ending portrait for my journey.

A time was when a boy fell in love with sunsets, especially rolling out red velvet on the blue sky. Actually, it was not red but almost orange. But the color didn't matter. All the boy wondered was why the color of the sky changed. It attracted the boy born in a very small and isolated village completely surrounded by high mountains. Actually, the village was one of the most undeveloped and remote areas in South Korea.

No telephone. No television. No car. There was even no bike in the entire village. But for him there were hundreds of books to read; furthermore, there was Great Mother Nature, full of spirituality. He would play with friends on the mountain and sit on the rock seeing the changing colors of the evening sky even after all the boys went down to their homes. He used to fully enjoy the sunset. As the sun hid behind big mountain, darkness tided toward him. Then he sprang off the rock and came down to his home with a big question in mind.

Questioning what the nature is was a little big to a boy. So he tried to be a Buddhist monk. But his parents never permitted him to become a monk. They, after having been advised by his homeroom teacher, ordered him to be a mathematics teacher with the only reason being he's very excellent at math. Therefore, he advanced in college and majored in mathematics.

Superficially he seemed to accept his destiny. In his soul, it wasn't a truth. His spirit full of passion is even now still seeking enlightenment as a philosopher and a Buddhist monk-like idiot, and his careers have been writer, math tutor, documentary producer, and now an international student majoring in political science at Northern Virginia Community College. The Homeostasis in his life is the inside Buddhist monk-like

idiot. But it can't be predicted what his next career of creative advance will be, due to the uncertainty of Dynamic Equilibrium in his life. One thing is certain though: He will be forever an idiot for awakening the unchanging Dharma.

———————

1. Those definitions are abstracted from the Encyclopedia Britannica and then rewritten.

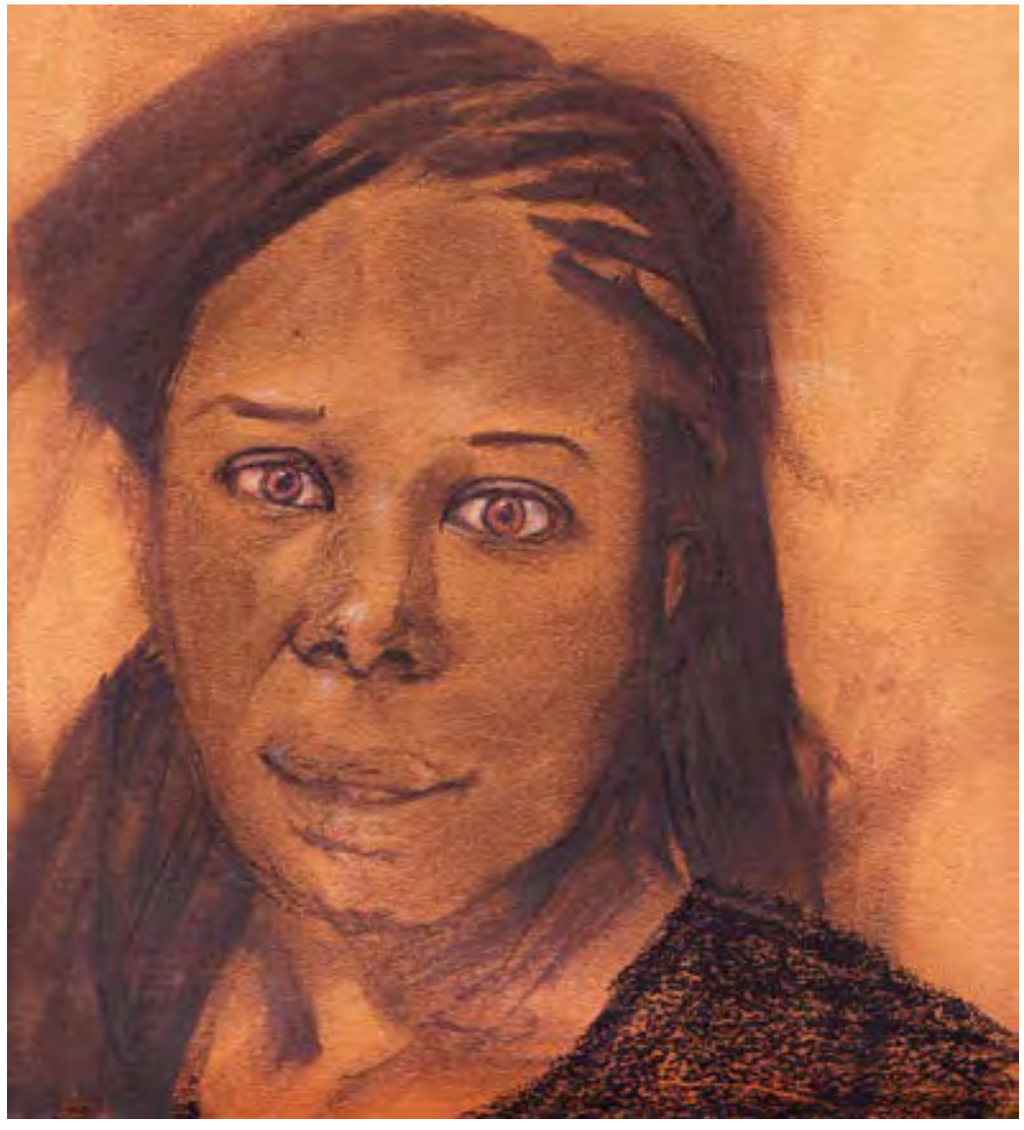
Celesta Ball

Twosies

Oil on Canvas

Uyanga Ganzorig

Portrait



Charcoal on Paper

Fiction

Timothy Frazier

A Fool's Gold

We Outreachers have deemed humans to be nothing more than simple birdbrain homunculi. We have observed your inclination for greed and power wax and wane since your first ancestors evolved from the dirt. Your attraction to lower concepts such as wealth and power pulls you away from any greater purpose you could call your own. Thus, it has shrouded all but an ounce of the true reality beyond your sight.

You know nothing. Nothing more than babes ignorant of the shadows they cast, yet strangely certain of the light and its purpose. We find you to be amusing. This unparallel disregard for the fragility of life is why I take great pleasure in testing your kind.

Are you worthy of the gift of mind? Do you deserve to feel the pleasures of desire? What gives you the right to exist amongst us; blissfully unaware of the consequences your actions echo throughout our realm? These are the questions we ponder and debate. And so we have concluded that you must concede that life, in all of its expansive glory, cannot be provided, but earned.

For my experiment, I entice fools and aimless thrill seekers to ancient crypts and forgotten temples with assurances of gold and artifacts that would permit their meager lives into experience greater states of extasy.

It is so easy for me to take flesh and meet you where you are. To spread a whisper here, a whisper there, attracting moths to my flame, a rat to the trap. None the wiser that the ruins they seek to pillage were created no more than a day ago.

It takes no effort on my part to carve a cave into the side of a mountain, add a few trivial accessories to paint its interior decorum. A few skeletons here, a few tattered beds there, a few rooms of aging knick-knacks to satisfy the illusion.

As per my desire, the wind delivers my rumors to all corners of the world gathering the desired pieces for my amusement. All come far and wide expecting riches and power beyond their wildest fantasies, but all the foolish rats will find are death and regret. Many will never find their way into the deepest depths of my inner chambers. Those who don't either die due to the complexities of my tricks and snares, some to the constructed guardians and shades of those who failed before them, while others, through either caution or wisdom, will take what trinkets they can and leave before they found what awaits them deeper in my lairs.

Rarely does a rat such as yourself, find their way to my innermost chambers unmarred by my tests and tricks, but once you do, you are greeted with a most wondrous sight. Whatever your heart's desire lay before. Riches that can buy out a kingdom, knowledge found only in the depths Abyssal Realms, spells cognizant by none alive, and artifacts potent enough to bend a world its knee. Any one of these prizes can be given to the rare few who have discovered the path, but first, you must complete my last trial.

Gaze upon the vastness of my being and answer my one of many questions if you still have a mind to think. Why should I ever let you go? You, who have reached so far bested every puzzle I've provided and now stand before me coherent despite the truth of my essence gazing back at you. Within you is a better treasure than anything I hold within this crypt. You, whose particles erode with every rotation through the infinite spiral. You who've bested an Outreacher, many of us than there are stars, akin to your gods but not bounded by the laws of fate, fewer than any you know by name, have bested us. You are what we have been searching for all along. Why should I, with such true wealth now in my grasp, ever let you go?

Tasneem Kayed

Emerald Fairy

Oil and Acrylic on Canvas

Poetry

Kirsten Arnolds

Agape

Fifty-six was the number of times he told her,
“I love you.”

Fifty-four was the number of times times she said,
“No. You don’t, but I love you.”

His 1st time, she had been bare.
Lush, unbound, her mouth aflame,
her hair rivers, her shoulders, the rocks.

Flesh like the color of a peach,
cheeks like wine,
eyes like a ‘nova.

Then she laughed.
Her voice silver and light as chimes.
“No, you don’t, not now.”

15th time, she had been gentle.
Milk and honey, her blood and bone.
Her form at the main door, holding her possessions.

A quiet songbird,
silent rain,
and a heart made of nectar and salt.

She grinned, her eyes archaic and strange.
“No, you don’t, but I love you.”

27th time, she had been glorious.
Terrifying and consuming, she was devastating,
a force that asked for a challenge, a flood that would not return to the sea.
Her body bombs and shrapnel under the crystalline light of the party.

Revolting beauty,
vulgar divinity,
no maiden at midnight.

She licked her lips and kissed him to submission.
“No, you don’t.” She spoke, almost to herself, “but I love you.”

34th time, she was broken.
Her body bleached and dry, blood solidified.
Uncanny, moonless, weak and surrendering.
Her spirit had died, and her life teetered on the rope as she lay on the cot.

Trapped bird,
the martyr for agape,
a radiant soul.

He trembled at her form, and she spoke in clouds.
“No, you don’t.” She licked away the tears of pain, “but I love you.”

“This you know now.”

49th time was in their bedroom.
Life now slow, mellow, peaceful.
She sunk into her bed and he looked at her form, tremulous waves under his skin.
He shivered, the world stepped out of the room.

“I love you,” he said, in her vicinity, her vulnerability.
“Maybe you do.” She cupped his face,
“but I love you more.”

The fifty-sixth time, she was by his bedridden side.
Humble and stubborn, but he’d been sincere.
Blood coagulated, man marred.
His face a war zone now like hers.

A revelation.
A believer,
and his climax.

“I love you.” He promised, saying it like a prayer.

Just like her, he began to love foolishly and never forgot its hunger.

“I knew,” she whispered,

“I always had.”

YuJung Lim

Purge Mask

Mixed Media

NonFiction

Awatef Ouasmine

Blossoms

Growing up in a busy city, on the other side of the Atlantic, where nature barely exists, I never really witnessed a proper season folding or unfolding. That was especially true for spring. I know that spring, in everybody's mind, always conveys blooming and beauty and flowers, but it never really touched me personally the way it did the first time I witnessed it in Virginia. It felt like a completely new experience for me. Nature discovery. So, I simply started paying more attention to this living breathing world around me, transitioning quietly in such beauty and grace.

Each season was an extreme change from the previous and the following one, a short-lived life cycle, but fully lived, as if it would never come to an end. The overwhelming beauty, yet tragic brevity of life itself, made me question and regain my perspective towards life, focusing on the present and not taking the good things in life for granted.

Was it always that beautiful? How come I had not noticed it before? Was I just getting older and more sensitive to those things now? I cannot tell for sure, but all I know is that the view of the pinkish cherry blossom trees for the first time made a huge impression on me. They seemed to generate a feeling of peace and tranquility. I was cheerful just looking at them. They were getting prettier by the day, greeting me every time I glanced at them - until they started falling, knitting what looked like a pink and white soft and cozy blanket in the process, totally taking me by surprise. That was fast! What was going on? It might sound ignorant, but I really did not know cherry blossoms had such a short life. What is the point of such breath-taking beauty if it fades that quickly? I kept wondering.

Now I know better, about their ephemeral beauty. I found out facts about their symbolism in other parts of the world, especially in Asia, where they are seen as a representation of the everlasting cycle of life, death and rebirth, and are grandiosely celebrated year after year.

After they found their way to Washington, D.C in 1912, gifted by the Japanese as a symbol of friendship and political alliance, the cherry blossom trees made a similar impact in the land of the free. That was understandable, given their peaceful grace, fragile but meaningful and deeply impressive existence; an existence that nothing could hurry for a day nor hold back a minute. The sure thing is, the cherry blossoms never fail to remind us all to live and value the present and enjoy life to the fullest with loved ones while it lasts.

Happy that I got to establish that special connection with the world around me, to this day, many years later, I still feel the same fascination and happiness whenever the cherry blossoms make their annual comeback, proving to the world again and again, that life is worth living, as short as it might be, despite deceptions, disappointments and even ends. After all, life, as they say, is not measured by the breaths we take but by the moments that take our breath away.

Unknown Artist

Untitled

Unknown Media

Poetry

Marina Kessenich

Donna

I have her hands, long slender fingers,
That look so much older than the rest of us.
One day I'll inherit her wedding ring.
Married for 66 years, while I was divorced in less than 1.

I wonder sometimes if I might be the luckier of us.

A grandmotherly grandma, Midwestern in her "oh dear"s.
Fudge, cookies, banana bread, brushing my hair.
She helped me tip the pale, watering her flowers,
Pointing to stone turtles, when I was just a little girl.

Sitting in her study, a sacred but open space
I felt that I sat within the walls of her existence,

A glimpse of a woman I did not know.

Paintings surround me, a vase, a face, serene scene.
Pictures of loved ones, sheet music marked and in order,
Accordion in the corner. I eavesdropped, unknown on the stairs,
As she pushed and pulled she would sing.

Precise and organized to an alarming extent,
She has an eye for beauty and symmetry
And judging by the books that she reads, or read,
And the judgements I'm sure she still passes,

She has a mind. I have her chin. I think, I might, I'm not sure.

In the evening after her husband's funeral, Catholic Mass
America the beautiful, Taps, bland food,
Cigarette after anxious cigarette, I found myself alone
With a newly widowed woman whom I loved but hardly knew.

I always found this family, The Kessenichs,
pleasant and kind, my affection for them,

every cousin, aunt, and uncle, sincere,
but I took the role of a smiling outsider

Heavy with hidden melancholy, my connection with them filtered
Through an unsteady connection with my father.

I see Donna as a Trienen amongst Kessenichs
As I was a Kessenich (Cunz, my mother's maiden name,

might be more appropriate), amongst Sharpes.
Their creator. We are the material, the thread, the labor.

But we are also ourselves, the child of someone else.
Maybe we could have been someone else.
After the last of our family walked out the door, I turned,
"you could try talking to her," cousin Jason said.

I felt a fool but I suppose it was an obvious truth after all.
And so we did. In the same basement where I had played Sequence
or a child's lap harp, and slept on the pull out couch.
We sat on the carpet, portraits of family surrounded us

as she revealed her life to me more than in any lengthy email she had sent
(Donna types with two fingers, key by key).
And for every truth she gifted, I grew claws on her behalf,
A visceral understanding, a shared bitterness.

And yet joy. What she did was meaningful,
I exist proudly of her and because of her.
This continued until the hands on the clock
held each other and she retreated to a lonely bed.

But I wouldn't go to church with her the next day.

The last time I saw her she had tears in her eyes
as she waved out the door. "Goodbye Grandma, I love you"
I promised as I left her in an empty house.

Uyanga Ganzorig

In Uniform

Colored Pencil on Paper

Poetry

Gretchen Deitrich

Feminam

Her eyes, a celestial realm of stars, studied the canvas as the brush made an elaborate display of color with a single stroke.

Her hair, billowing plumes of black, traced down her spine like a roadway.

She dipped back into the palette, a daring choice of red as she gracefully traced the brush along the outline.

Perched on top of the distressed stool, her body, sculpted from a Greek goddess was a mere distraction to her internal intellect.

Her movements continued, bringing the brush up to the top of the canvas, as a cascade of color began to emerge.

Poetry

Vex Singh

Forced Flight

A chicken
Sits on the table,
Empty.
And flightless.

A red news logo flashes on
The screen of the television.
The country does not match the visuals.

Cracked open
  Windows
Let in cold air
And lead to
  Heartbreak.

The chicken is getting cold.

Faces of the past are
    Turned down
Yet the same blue eyes remain.

The chicken is in fact,
A husk of a man
Standing in a stolen suit.
Flightless.

Until the hen
          Kicks
Him out.

Dilara Lyigun

Crumpled Bowl

Ceramic

Dilara Lyigun

Distance Socializing

Digital Art

Poetry

Marina Kessenich

Head God

I have legs but they aren't legs,
They are vehicles that I shave before going to the beach,
That freckle for decoration and seasonal demarcation.
They carry and demand to be felt,
To be noticed,
Too primitive for wheels,
god didn't invent the wheel,
But dung beetles had the right idea
And humans invented them on the path to becoming god.

Our vehicles tie us to our orangutan cousins,
Who do cartwheels on trees,
And eat ants from bark as we cook
And spray ants on our counters
And worry about the habitats of orangutans,
Or we don't worry,
Just contemplate,
Or we remain preoccupied,
Or ignorant,
Or self-important.

My arms are no better than a stick
With a shark jaw on the end,
But they will decompose,
Not pollute.

My thumbs deceive,
They make me seem so capable,
But I fumble and I can't reach the top shelf,
Even on the odd toes of my vehicles,
And my elbows are susceptible to such acute pain.

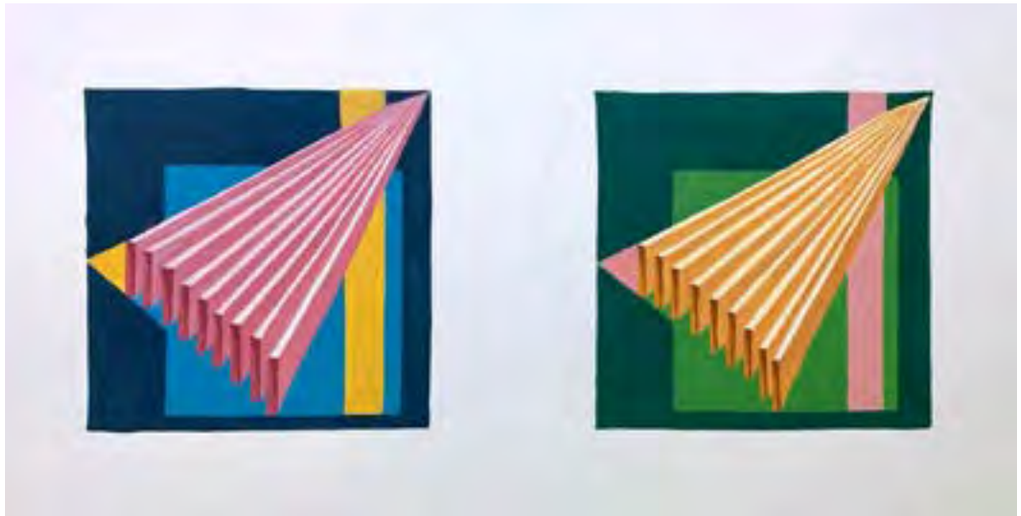
My torso is a platter for diseased thinking,
Obsession,
And constant correction.

My back is forgotten.

My head is God.

Jiho Baek

Narrow Start



Colored Ink on Paper

Poetry

June Song

Just Like Us

i saw

a sunrise

half
asleep
It was like
A Heaven's Opening

but maybe
it was
all

just

a dream

Poetry

Brian Castro-Escobar

Lone Journey

i have to leave a trail of breadcrumbs
sometimes,
traveling miles but
never even have to lift my head from my pillow
just need to get wrapped in the dark
so i can see what isn't there,
understand what's never left my side
and feel what makes me most alive

every experience and memory that left me light on my feet
is soaked up and sealed, becoming a part of me
and together we go collecting more magic.

i live in a world of my own and i want nothing more than
to invite others
in for lunch because the more the merrier
but i'm fine just dining in a table for one too.

i haven't a grasp about where i'll be in 5 years' time
and for some it may raise a flag, but for me,
i'm building and will never stop building a place inside,
where i can escape away to at anytime
regardless of whatever i'm doing,
wherever i am
to be enough and feel complete
despite the outside feeling otherwise.

and i'll leave breadcrumbs to find my way back.

Duane Ball

Pipe Dream

Oil on Canvas

Dilara Lyigun

Complementary Veggies

Acrylic on Paper

Poetry

Brian Castro-Escobar

Migration

when i feel

overwhelmed

with joy a bit

of excess good

leaves my body

in the form of birds

who return to me

when i need their

presence the most.

Poetry

Marina Kessenich

Mothers Love

Maybe I should stop telling her that I love her
Not because I've stopped, I never could.
But because love is not yelling, or berating,
Or ignoring the tears flowing down someone's face.

I think this as I walk down the same sidewalk,
My suburban labyrinth, with sidewalk chalk
Washing away in a warm summer's rain.
I imagine my emotions and ideations,

As thick tentacles of light, limbs protruding from every part of my torso,
manipulating the bushes, Monday night trash bags, bugs, and slugs,
As an artist would if that artist wasn't aware that
Others would find it odd to pause your walk and

Dressed in a poncho, tall socks, and pink cap,
Kneel into the grass, scoop with both hands
Into the dirt and pretend to bury all the hard feelings
In hopes that they might grow into some invisible tree

Where only I could come to worship,
And paint my knees with dirt,
And fill my nails with dirt,
And wash my hair with dirt.

Maybe I should stop telling her that I love her,
But I couldn't stop telling her that I love her,
For she is the unshakable essence of what
I once thought humanity was, it lives in her

In her hair, and in her large front teeth,
And knobby knees, and her ability to say
"Mom, that's not okay", as I hide the fact,
That I have heard every word she says.

And I know that she is right,

As I too was right as a child,
But I always second guessed,
And that's where maybe she'll be stronger than me.

But I will wear on her over time,
As the absence of her father,
That I myself brought upon her,
Rips at her protective poncho,

And the rain that I am seeps in.

Poetry

Jared Alexander Frost

The Citarum River

Sewage-like odor batters
Against the hull of his row boat

Drifting through tainted waters.
Untreated factory dyes

Viciously dumped
Stained iridescent yellow

Red, blue and green current mix
Lead and mercury swept below.

His family drinks from here.

They pile waste along its banks.
His children flood the fields here

While he casts his hook into
The winding river, searching
For anything strong enough
To survive under the weight of
Greed, power and industry.

He remembers the river
As a small child, clear and free.

Where has nature run off to?
Where are all the fish hiding?

Dilara Lyigun

Texas

Digital Art

NOVA
Northern Virginia
Community College